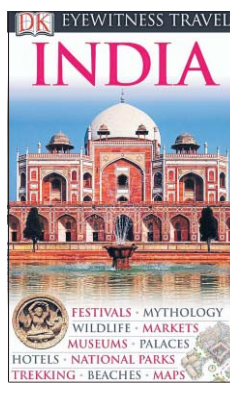


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Readers can win copies of lavishly illustrated *India: Eyewitness Travel Guide*.

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**NOTABLE SEASON**

Most skifields had improved facilities this season, says Mike Deacon in his final Snow Views column for the year.

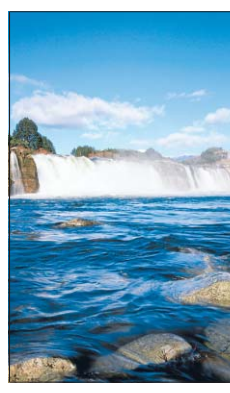
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The Maruia Falls are a popular drop for kayakers, writes Pat Barrett.

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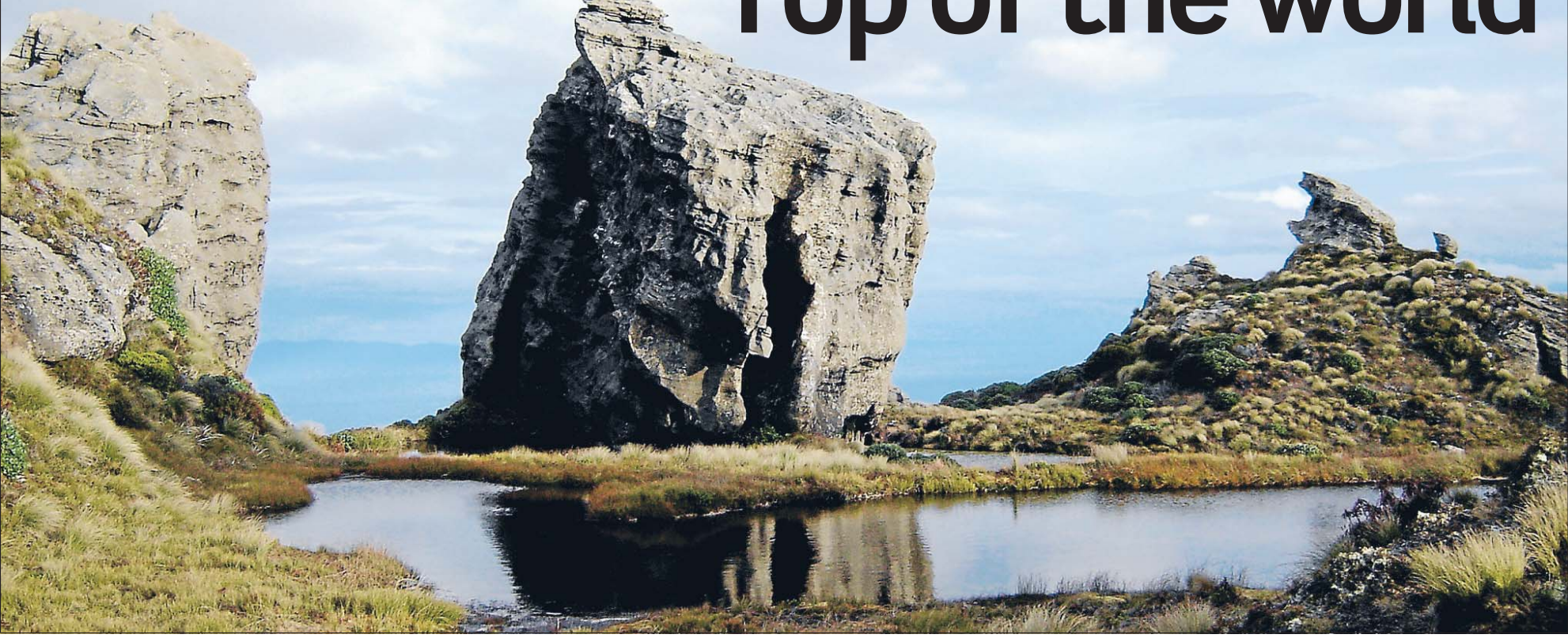


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# Top of the world



**Inspiration:** Best known as the Hump Ridge but with greater claim to fame in the music world.

Photo: JOHN CONLY

A small South Island town claims a link with a chart-topping song of the 1970s, writes HUGH CONLY.

It's as far from the bright lights and glitz of American showbiz as can be imagined. But a windswept landmark in New Zealand's deep south is regarded by some Southlanders as the inspiration for a worldwide hit song by the Carpenters.

The Hump Ridge, west of Tuatapere, is best known today as the 900-metre summit of a private track that takes trampers most of a day to climb. Those with energy to spare after the long, hard slog can stroll around a striking collection of ridgetop rocks, several poised at jaunty angles and reflected in surrounding pools.

However, some Tuatapere residents say the ridge has a lesser known but greater claim to fame as a link with a chart-topping song by Karen and Richard Carpenter.

Quiet, rural Southland may seem a world away from the lives of two of the bestselling American singing stars of the 1970s. But in her 1997 book *White Moas and Artichokes*, the late Shona McFarlane, prominent New Zealand artist and broadcaster, explained the unlikely connection.

She told how her friend,

Dorothy Sherriff, a Southland schoolteacher, wrote a poem the night after her mother's funeral and sent the words to the Carpenters because she thought they might make good lyrics for a song.

According to McFarlane, Sherriff's poem began: *"I'm on the top of the world looking down on creation and the only explanation I can find"*

McFarlane said the Carpenters paid Sherriff about \$200 for the poem. They then changed a few words and put them to music.

*Top of the World*, released in 1973, shot to No 1 in the United States and Canadian singles charts and No 5 in Britain.

For his version of the story, *The Press* contacted Richard Carpenter in California. Through a spokeswoman, he denied any knowledge of the matter, describing it as "pure fiction".

But Sherriff's only surviving relative in Tuatapere, Lyla Sherriff, says she has no doubts about McFarlane's account.

"It's something that's always been known about in the family. I'm sure in my own mind it is true."

After the song became a hit,



**The Carpenters:** Richard, 27, and Karen, 24, arrive in London in 1974 for sell-out shows.

Photo: REUTERS

she says Dorothy tried without success for a share of the royalties. Legally, however, the Carpenters were within their rights for not crediting Dorothy and she reluctantly admitted it.

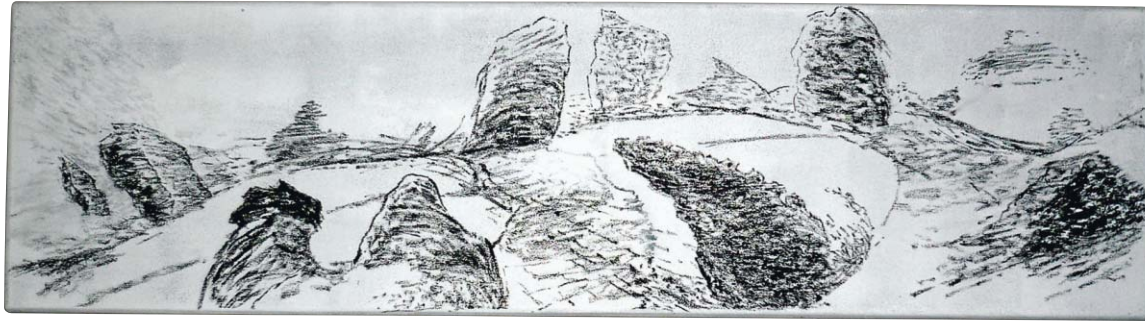
Dorothy Sherriff died many years ago and was buried in the Tuatapere cemetery. Over the years, the legend of how the small-town Southlander made it big on

the world music stage has grown in Tuatapere.

Teacher Margaret Thomas says Sherriff may have been inspired to write her poem as she looked out at the Hump Ridge, the dominant range of hills nearby. At the opening ceremony of the Hump Ridge track in 2001, Tuatapere schoolchildren sang *Top of the World* to celebrate the song's possible link with the area.

Today, the Hump Ridge continues to inspire those who climb it. Photographers delight in the tors and tarns at the summit. Dunedin artist Peter Belton, who climbed the ridge last year, has produced a series of drawings of the summit rocks, which, he says, suggest animal forms.

For most trampers, the views alone – extending from Fiordland to Stewart Island – are worth the effort of the climb. On a clear day, it's not hard for anyone to believe they are on top of the world.



**Animal forms suggested:** Dunedin artist Peter Belton has produced a series of drawings of the summit rocks.

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